

'In Saint Iagoes Parke': Iago as Catholic Machiavel in Dekker's *The Whore of Babylon*

FRANK R. ARDOLINO

In *The Whore of Babylon* (1607), Thomas Dekker parallels the Catholic plots against Titania's (Queen Elizabeth I) life with the continuing Catholic threats against James I. The play is set in Elizabethan times and celebrates the narrow triumphs of Titania (Elizabeth) over her various enemies from her accession in 1558 to the Essex conspiracy in 1601. However, Dekker does not only celebrate things past and glorious, but also alludes to the Catholic conspiracies in the years immediately following Elizabeth's death. For example, as Daniel B. Dodson has demonstrated, Dekker includes an allusion to the infamous Gunpowder Plot of 1605 in which English Catholic dissidents attempted to blow up James I and the houses of Parliament.¹ When the Empress of Babylon instructs the spies whom she is sending to England to kill Titania, her words actually allude to the apprehension on January 10, 1606, of conspirators Robert Winter and Stephen Littleton in a haymow and the subsequent discovery twenty days later of two Jesuits also implicated in the plot in a hidden cubicle behind an artificial wall:

... if that bloud-hound hunt you,
(That long-ear'd Inquisition) take the thickets,
Climbe up to Hay-mowes . . .
or like to Ancesses,
Close up your selves in artificall wals:²

The most significant means Dekker uses to signal the continuity of the Catholic danger is through the introduction of Shakespeare's villain Iago as a shibboleth for the Catholic conspirators. The major plot of the play

¹"Allusions to the Gunpowder Plot in Dekker's *The Whore of Babylon*," *N&Q*, 204 (1959), 257.

²*The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker* ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1955), II, III, i., 153-155, 159-160. All quotations are from this edition.

concerns the attempt of Paridell to assassinate Titania. Dekker borrowed this action directly from the account in Holinshed's *Chronicles* of the actual attempt on Elizabeth's life in 1585 by a Jesuit convert Dr. William Parry.³ In his confession, Edmund Neville, Parry's co-conspirator, revealed that Parry had planned to kill Elizabeth in St. James' Park. In the play Dekker makes a significant change by having Paridell, Parry's literary counterpart, announce that he plans to kill Elizabeth in St. Iago's Park:

In Saint *Iagoes* parke; a rare, rare Altar!
 The fitt'st to sacrificize her bloud upon:
 It shall be there in Saint *Iagoes* Parke:
 (V.i.59-61)

The shift of names serves four related purposes. First, the deliberate anachronism of inserting the name of an evil plotter from Shakespeare's *Othello*, which was written in 1604, into a dramatic plot ostensibly unfolding in 1585 graphically illustrates Dekker's intention to parallel Elizabethan and Jacobean conspiracies. Second, the substitution of names connects the English, Spanish and Italian Catholic plotters. *Iago* is the Spanish form of *James* and a variant of the Italian *Iachomo* or *Como*. Significantly, one of the most influential Catholic conspirators in the play as in reality is Cardinal Como, who convinces Paridell-Parry that he has the right to kill the Queen. It is on the strength of Como's letter that Paridell believes that he has ecclesiastical sanction for his plot. Thus, when Paridell declares that he will assassinate Elizabeth in St. Iago's Park, he acts as a tool of Cardinal Como, an Iago-like villain.

Third, the contradiction implicit in the name "St. Iago" captures the hypocrisy of Paridell. Iago repeatedly claims he is "honest," and protected by his unfounded reputation for candor, the devil figure manages to destroy Othello's life. Similarly, although Paridell makes an effusive show of his "honesty" by revealing to the merciful Titania that he has been involved in Catholic plots, he still reserves an Iago-like hatred of her:

... I ha spent
 My youth, and meanes in seruing her:
 what reape I?

³Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1808; New York: AMS Press, 1965), IV, 560-580. In *The Whore of Babylon* by Thomas Dekker," *EA*, 6(1953), 42-43, M. T. Jones-Davies points to Dekker's extensive use of Holinshed for his account of Parry's machinations.

Wounds (discontents) what giues she me? good words
 (Sweet meates that rotte the eater:) why, last day
 I did but begge of her the maistership
 Of Santa Cataryna, 'twas denied me.

(V.i.78-83)

Fourth, the name change points specifically to the Jesuits as the most pernicious and persistent conspirators against Elizabeth and James. By placing Iago in an obvious sacerdotal context as the altar upon which the sacrifice of Elizabeth will take place, Dekker interprets Iago in a manner similar to what Shakespeare may have intended in *Othello*. As Daniel Stempel has persuasively argued, the religious context of *Othello* concerns the Jesuits' attempt in the early seventeenth century to overthrow the secular power in Venice, which was sympathetic to the Protestant cause.⁴ At the time Shakespeare wrote *Othello*, the Jesuits had aroused extreme unrest and in 1607 were expelled from Venice. Stempel maintains that Iago emerges as the embodiment of Jesuitical equivocation who destroys Othello and in effect attempts to undermine the established government.⁵

With Shakespeare's theme as his context, Dekker uses Iago's name as the epitome of his cast of Jesuit plotters. Campeius, the literary counterpart of the Jesuit Edmund Campion, is a scheming Jesuit who infiltrates Titania's court but is arrested when his machinations are revealed (IV.i). Paridell is urged by the learned Jesuit Palmio to murder the Queen just as Dr. Parry, according to his confession in Holinshed, "pursued my first conceived purpose in Venice" (p. 570) at the urging of Benedicto Palmio. Paridell's own casuistry is demonstrated when he attempts to convince a Scotsman to murder the ruler for the good of England. The final link between Dekker's "St. Iago," Shakespeare's Iago, and the actual Jesuits is provided by the resemblance of Iago's name to the celebrated founder of the order Iñigo Lopez de Recalde (St. Ignatius de Loyola).

In addition to these four purposes, Dekker may be indicating another more daring and possibly treasonous implication of his substitution of *Iago* for *James*. Dekker may be saying that King James I has become an Iago-like ally of Catholicism in the early years of his reign. Following the death of Elizabeth in 1603 and the passing of most of the old guard of her staunchly Protestant advisors, with the prominent exception of the wily Robert Cecil, English Protestants felt uneasy about the religious predilections and policies of James I. His being the son of the executed Catholic

⁴Daniel Stempel, "The Silence of Iago," *PMLA*, 84(1969), 252-263.

⁵Another pertinent article on Shakespeare's treatment of equivocation is Frank Huntley, "Macbeth and the Background of Jesuitical Equivocation," *PMLA*, 59(1964), 390-400.

Mary Queen of Scots, his marriage to the Catholic Anne of Denmark, his treaty with Spain in 1604, the first stirrings of the match between James' son Prince Henry and the Spanish Infanta, and James' dismissal of the Millenary Petition, which was intended to gain greater official acceptance for the Puritan clergy, followed by his subsequent ejection of 300 of them in 1604 — all of these factors suggested to a wary country that there was a growing Jacobean Catholic bias. Anti-Catholic sentiment was inflamed further by the discovery of Cobham's plot with Spain to install James' cousin, the Catholic Arabella Stuart, on the throne, and by the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. As Ribner points out, it is this combined sense of celebration over the country's delivery from yet another Catholic plot and fear of continued Catholic infiltration which prompted Dekker to write *The Whore of Babylon*.⁶ When he replaces "St. James" with "St. Iago," Dekker perhaps is warning the King not to become an Iago to the English nation by capitulating to the Catholic Whore of Babylon Spain. It is my overall sense that Dekker is not being so unwise as to condemn England's monarch as a treacherous Iago, but is directing James toward more emphatic Protestant policies in the face of the ongoing Spanish threat.⁷

University of Hawaii at Manoa

⁶Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, rev. ed. (1957; London: Methuen, 1965), pp. 285-286.

⁷In "The Names of Thomas Dekker's Devils," *Names*, 3(1955), 210-218, Kelsie B. Harder argues that Dekker's *Newes from Hell* (1606) contains an allusion to King James as the "Degeo of Devils." *Degeo* like *Iago* is the Spanish for *James*. I do not think that Dekker is being that treasonous in *The Whore of Babylon*.